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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MADRID 003540

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/06/2015

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [MO](#) [SP](#)

SUBJECT: SPAIN: MIGRANT ASSAULT CRISIS CHALLENGES ZAPATERO GOVERNMENT

REF: CASABLANCA 1052

Classified By: Polcouns Kathy Fitzpatrick; reason 1.4 (D)

1. (C) Summary. After weeks of increasingly brazen and dangerous incursions by illegal immigrants into the Spanish North African enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, the Zapatero administration launched a high-profile effort to stem the flood of sub-Saharan immigrants into the two cities. Zapatero faced growing criticism by the opposition Popular Party that he was failing to enforce border security and was not exerting enough pressure on the Moroccan government to help cut the flow of migrants. The government has gradually escalated its response, ordering additional troops to the enclaves to improve border security and authorizing the construction of an additional barrier to supplant the two fences that have failed to block hundreds of migrants from entering over the last several weeks. On October 5, FM Moratinos announced that Spain would activate a long-standing agreement with Morocco to accept the return of migrants, including non-Moroccan citizens that cross into the enclaves; the first group of migrants were scheduled to be transferred to Moroccan custody on October 6 but the move did not take place. Zapatero dispatched Vice President Maria Teresa Fernandez de la Vega to Ceuta and Melilla to observe developments. Zapatero resisted early calls for him to go to the enclaves as well, but now indicates that he may go. The Spanish government is trapped between its desire to improve relations with Morocco and concern that the migration crisis will open Zapatero to criticism by Spanish nationalists that he has been too "soft" on Morocco. End Summary.

//A CRISIS BUILDS...//

2. (U) Migrants have attempted twelve mass incursions into Ceuta and Melilla since August 28, with five incidents since September 27 involving 500 or more migrants. Melilla has borne the brunt of the incursions, though the most deadly incident took place on September 29 in Ceuta, where as many as five migrants are believed to have died and over 100 suffered injuries when 700 individuals attempted to breach the border. The border incursions have become increasingly dangerous as migrants have begun to attack Spanish police officials with stones and other weapons in order to avoid capture. An additional 500 migrants attempted to cross into Melilla on October 6 and there were initial indications that six migrants may have died in that incident. In all, 6,000 persons have attempted to enter Ceuta and Melilla since August 28, at least 721 have managed to enter the enclaves, eight migrants have died, and 307 migrants and 19 Spanish security officials have been injured.

//INITIAL RESPONSE FAILS//

3. (U) The Spanish media devoted considerable coverage to the incursions, leading the Zapatero government to respond with high-profile, but limited steps to stem the flow of migrants. These included the dispatch of three military units to shore up security along the fenceline between Melilla and Morocco and the construction of a third barrier along that border. However, some soldiers complained that their strict rules of engagement essentially prevented them from presenting much more than a psychological deterrent to desperate refugees determined to reach their objective. An October 3 crossing by 740 migrants was among the most violent yet, with seven Spanish security officials injured in the melee.

//STONGER STEPS ENACTED//

4. (U) The use of violence by the migrants and the failure of the increased military presence to halt the incursions prompted the Zapatero government to adopt additional measures on October 5. FM Moratinos announced that Spain would activate provisions of a 1992 agreement with Morocco that allow for the expedited return of migrants from Spanish territory to Morocco. The first group of migrants was scheduled to be transported from Melilla to Morocco on October 6, but the transfer was delayed. Vice President Fernandez de la Vega, dispatched to the enclaves by President Zapatero, asserted that the agreement with Morocco did not contravene Spanish immigration laws requiring a full case study for each deportee. Spanish affiliates of NGOs "Doctors Without Borders" and "SOS Racism" argued against implementation of the agreement with Morocco, claiming that over 40 percent of migrants suffered abuse at the hands of

Moroccan authorities. The Spain representative of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Carlos Boggio, joined the NGOs, criticizing the Spanish government for returning the migrants to Morocco "because human rights are violated (in that country)."

//TAMING NATIONALIST RUMBLINGS//

15. (U) Against the backdrop of the migration crisis, Zapatero has faced opposition criticism that he has not pressed the Moroccan government hard enough or demanded greater cooperation to restrain the flood of migrants into Ceuta and Melilla. The incursions were particularly inopportune for the Spanish government, spiking even as the leaders and cabinets of both countries were meeting in Sevilla for their bilateral High Level Summit. Zapatero avoided public statements on the issue during the Summit, earning further criticism from political opponents and the municipal leaders of Ceuta and Melilla (which are governed by the opposition Popular Party) that he was ceding to Moroccan designs to gain control of the two enclaves. He felt sufficient pressure to declare publicly on October 6 that Spanish sovereignty over the enclaves was "not at issue" and said he would visit both Ceuta and Melilla, though he did not set a date. Zapatero emphasized Spain's openness to controlled migration, but noted that the yawning "prosperity gap" between Spain and Morocco meant that illegal migration would remain a problem. He also called on the EU to send a commission to study the problem, since Ceuta and Melilla effectively represent the EU's border with North Africa, and urged a reinvigoration of the Barcelona Process.

//COMMENT//

16. (C) Improved relations with Morocco remain one of Zapatero's top foreign policy priorities. However, skepticism of Moroccan intentions runs deep across Spain's political spectrum, in large part because of the Western Sahara issue but also because of nationalist sentiment in favor of continued control over Ceuta and Melilla. In this context, Zapatero finds himself working against popular sentiment in order to solidify a strategic partnership with Rabat. The migration crisis has complicated this effort, but thus far the Zapatero government seems committed to managing both domestic requirements and its relations with Morocco.
AGUIRRE